

VZCZCXYZ0038
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHCV #0535/01 0611824
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 021824Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3378
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6087
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5233
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 1047
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN PRIORITY 0077
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN PRIORITY 0143
RUEHGT/AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA PRIORITY 0872
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAR 1724
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 9930
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 1019
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 1045
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1796
RUEHSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR PRIORITY 0809
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 3299
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 0328
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 000535

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/21/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR HOSTS LUNCHEON FOR UNIVERSITY DIRECTORS

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Downes for reasons 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The Ambassador hosted a luncheon on February 9 for administrators of several Venezuelan universities. In addition to expressing their eagerness for greater educational exchanges between Venezuelan and American universities, representatives also expressed concern that a proposed education law in the Venezuelan National Assembly would force universities to relinquish their autonomy to the government. The BRV's Law of Community Service for University Students dictates that all university graduates must devote one year of service to Venezuelan social programs. Director of Universidad Monteavila Joaquin Rodriguez Alonso said university students were concerned that in order to fulfill the requirement, they would be assigned to one of the BRV's social "mission" programs. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On February 9, The Ambassador hosted a luncheon at his residence for directors of several Venezuelan universities. In attendance were Benjamin Scharifker, Director of Universidad Simon Bolivar, Rita Elena Anez, Director of Universidad Nacional Experimental Politecnica Antonio Jose de Sucre in Barquisimeto, Father Luis Ugalde, Director of the Universidad Catolica Andres Bello, Jose Ignacio Moreno Leon, Director of the Universidad Metropolitana, Luis Marin Ramirez, Director of the Universidad Pedagogica Experimental Libertador, Joaquin Rodriguez Alonso, Director of the Universidad Monteavila and Professor Albinson Linares from the Universidad Nacional Experimental del Tachira in San Cristobal. Collectively, representatives from these universities expressed a desire to increase the number of English-language courses offered by their respective universities, and the number of educational exchanges with American universities. (Note: The Ambassador offered to push more their way.) Scharifker said there were currently seven students from the Universidad Simon Bolivar on exchange in the United States, but the objective, he continued, was to increase the number to 50 or more.

13. (C) Prior to the luncheon, Leon told Poloff that university administrators were concerned that, if passed, the Organic Law on Education would erode universities' autonomy. Father Ugalde doubted the education law would advance in the National Assembly during a Presidential election year. (Note: Luis Acuna, President of the National Assembly's Commission on Education said February 16 that the Commission's members planned to visit several Venezuelan cities in the coming months to test the waters regarding public opinion of the proposed Education Law. The objective, he commented, was to obtain approval for the Law before August 15.) Regardless of whether or not the National Assembly approves the Education Law in 2006, there was a general consensus among luncheon attendees that the BRV would continue using funding as leverage to coerce private and public universities to implement its vision for education.

14. (C) Under the BRV's Law of Community Service for University Students, graduates of both public and private universities are required to devote one year of work to social programs in Venezuela. University students were concerned that in order to fulfill the requirement, they would be assigned to one of the government's social "mission" programs, according to Alonso. To create better alternatives for recent and future graduates, the Ambassador suggested university administrators consider working with local companies that maintain a social projects budget. (Note: PAO recently spoke with a contact at the Venezuelan-American Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Venamcham) who said Venamcham was working on a solution whereby university students would also be able to complete the one-year social responsibility requirement in local companies.)

15. (C) Comment: The Ambassador's luncheon on February 9 demonstrates a desire by administrators to fortify exchanges between Venezuelan and American universities. There is great worry about BRV intervention in education, especially with the Education Law pending. If passed, it would potentially erode the autonomy currently enjoyed by Venezuelan universities. Undoubtedly aware of the integral role schools and universities play in the socialization of students and the formation of their political ideologies, Chavez is not likely to abandon his interest in the education system.

BROWNFIELD